Consistency is Key

While reading chapter five of Steven Pinker's "The Sense of Style" I soon realized that consistency is key when writing a good paper. I really enjoy the example passages that Pinker uses to explain the reasoning for coherency. In the first example he uses there are five sentences that have a similar correlation but do not flow properly. This paragraph was a perfect example of incoherent writing. Pinker states, "The individual sentences are clear enough, and they obviously pertain to a single topic. But the passage is incomprehensible." Pinker goes further than this and explains how each sentence makes sense separately but does not coincide with each other to form an educated paragraph.

Pinker exclaims," Whenever one sentence comes after another, readers need to see a connection between them. So eager are readers to seek coherence that they will often supply it when none exists." He even goes as far as saying, "It's the hunger for coherence that drives the entire process of understanding language." While reading this chapter I have been very conscious of how Pinker is arranging his sentences to flow together. By reading this it makes me very self-conscious of the way I will be writing and how to connect my sentences, start a new paragraph, and still keep the readers engaged without confusing them.

Another thing that may seem obvious but can easily be misconstrued is the topic. Coherence starts with the reader and writer both understanding the topic and how it coincides with the entire writing. Pinker explains that, "The topic corresponds to the small territory within the vast web of knowledge into which the incoming sentences should be merged." This may seem as simple as stating what you are going to talk about, but some writers get stuck in the curse of knowledge and just automatically assume that the readers will know what they are writing about. Pinker gives more funny examples in this section, about how writers will sometimes wait until the end of the writing and then tell the reader what the topic was. This does not do the reader any good, because the entire time they are reading all they can think about it how the sentences make sense together. Not knowing the topic of a paper or essay would ruin the transparency and only make the reader confused.